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# **The Caucasus Conflict and Russian Security: the Russian Armed Forces Confront Chechnya**

## **Part One, Section Two: Military Activities of the Conflict During 11-31 December 1994**

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*\*\*Note: This article is based on open source literature published in the Russian press, and items broadcast on Russian radio and TV. Most, but not all, of the reports are from the Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS). During the intervention, Russian government and Chechen sources accused one another of placing disinformation in the press. This effort does not aim to prove one point of view correct. It's aim is merely to provide a framework and some logic for the events that have occurred and their consequences.*

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(This is Part One, Section Two of a longer article on the Russian Armed Forces intervention into Chechnya in December 1994. Part One, Section One covered the military-political aspects of the intervention. This section deals exclusively with military activities)

#### ***The North Caucasus Military District***

Dr. Jacob W. Kipp of the Foreign Military Studies Office recently wrote a short description of the Caucasus Military District. His description offers a view of the area that is close to a Russian Army view in that it looks at the region as an integral part of the Caucasus theater of military action and not as a separate area.<sup>1</sup> Since 1988 the region has been the site of ethnic hostilities of vary intensities. The Armenian-Azeri conflict over the control of Nagorno-Karabakh is the oldest and most intractable of the ethnic conflicts in the region. Russian troops (regular army and internal) were used on repeated occasions to stabilize such conflicts (separating the two sides, rounding up weapons, controlling movement of means and equipment) while political leaders have sought solutions without success. Since the 1991 declaration of independence and sovereignty by General Dzhohkar Dudayev's regime in Chechnya, the Caucasian territories of the Russian Federation have become volatile. The civil wars in Georgia and the unsuccessful effort to replace Dudayev in Chechnya in late 1994 led Russian troops deeper into the Caucasus, protecting Commonwealth Independent States' Lines of Communications in the region. Russian officers are reading the memoirs of their forefathers who fought Shamil for three decades in the same region for "lessons learned."

The Military District with responsibility for the Caucasus region is the North Caucasian Military District with its headquarters in Rostov-on-Donu (See Map One). This district includes all of the North Caucasus region and the Don-Volga lands from Rostov-on-Donu to Astrakhan on the Caspian Sea, and from Dagestan in the south to the Volgograd Region in the north. This Military District includes many ethno-national regions, including Kalmyk Republic, Dagestan, Karachaevo-Cherkess Republic, Kabardino-Balkar Republic, North Ossetia, Chechnya, and Ingushetia. It borders on four independent states: Ukraine, Kazakhstan, Georgia, and Azerbaijan. Within Russia it borders on the Voronezh and Saratov Regions. The end of the Soviet Union turned this Military District from a supporting to a frontline role in a very complex threat environment where external threats and internal instability are linked.<sup>2</sup>

The area and the people form a significant "other" identity for Russians, who see Chechens and other Caucasian peoples as distinct outsiders. A major theme in Russian literature, as seen in Pushkin, Lermantov, and Tolstoy, is the inability of the Russian to "go native" without losing his soul. Linkages among the various existing and potential conflicts make for an explosive combination that could spread warfare throughout the region. Potential external intervention that must concern Moscow comes from Iran. The numerous nationalities and their diverse interests make for an unstable set of conflicts, with Russia trying to play divide and rule. Flashbacks of the conflict into Russia are possible via the Volga lands and Tartarstan, and these could extend challenges to Russia's territorial integrity. The involvement of the rest of the Caucasus region is a distinct prospect while the impact on the independent states of Central Asia is, at this date, too difficult to determine.<sup>3</sup>

### ***Planning the operation.***

Many analysts blame the initial poor performance of the Russian Armed Forces on a lack of planning. The evidence indicates otherwise. On 10 May 1994, Defense Minister Grachev, at a wreath laying ceremony, said that the North Caucasus Military District is "ready for combat, that armies are gradually being replaced by brigades and corps, and that the creation of mobile forces and the replacement of air defense forces with air and space defense forces is nearly completed."

<sup>4</sup> A month and a half later Grachev told Interfax that Russia intended to build a huge military district in the North Caucasus boasting mobile and other forces. He said that Moscow had "worked diligently over the past two years to transform the district into an army group capable of waging either small or large conflicts." He added that the district's regular military forces would help the Internal Troops of the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD) when required. These remarks came at the start of an inspection tour of troops deployed in the Caucasus Military District. <sup>5</sup>

This positive assessment was not the only indicator of prior planning. On 15 September ITAR-TASS reported that the North Caucasus Military District would conduct a command and staff exercise from September 20 to September 24. The Russian Ground Force commander, Colonel General Vladimir Semenov, would have overall responsibility for the exercise. The report noted the following:

...for the first time in the practice of command and staff exercises, control over all formations and units of fighting services and branches of arms stationed on the territory of the district will be entrusted to the commander of the troops of the district, Colonel General Alexey Mityukin. <sup>6</sup>

This means that the MVD and armed forces were practicing the interoperability of their forces. In December, the two would enter battle together. It is not known if the exercise scenario included a Chechen variant, but at least it is clear that the planning and preparations for joint operations began at least three months before the intervention.

The most damaging evidence of prior planning at the highest operational levels appeared in a report in late December. Writing in Nezavisimaya Gazeta on 31 December Igor Korotchenko talked of increased morale among Russian forces due to the presence of a new commander, General Lieutenant Anatoly Kvashnin, who was previously the first deputy chief of the Russian General Staff. Korotchenko noted that:

...since last October, General Kvashnin has been supervising a General Staff operations group on Chechnya, and he is better informed than anyone else on the situation there. Once there, he quickly put an end to the tumult and disarray, organized a steady command and control of the troops, and got the intelligence service working. As a result, personnel losses have decreased. <sup>7</sup>

Thus two months before the intervention there is a General Staff footprint of involvement. President Yeltsin most likely was informed of the potential intervention and appeared to hint at that fact in November. In a conference with military commanders, Moscow News reported that the Commander-in-Chief "carefully sounded out the generals' reaction to the possible use of the Army inside the country, talking about the need for it to cooperate with the Ministry of Internal Affairs troops..." <sup>8</sup> A few days later, in an interview with ITAR-TASS, Defense Minister Grachev said that Russia's mobile force was ready for world-wide deployment. He added that the chance of a global war had diminished, but that there was a greater chance that a local conflict may occur. He noted that "the growth of aggressive nationalism, separatism, and regional fundamentalism are a dangerous challenge to world stability." Russia, he added, must react to these threats by warning of the consequences of such actions and, should the need arise, be capable of rebuffing aggression and routing the enemy. <sup>9</sup> Thus, in a steady but quiet manner, the

armed forces' leadership prepared to take action within its own borders. Many officers and soldiers, undertrained and demoralized by budget restraints, would pay for the decision.

### *Officer and soldier morale.*

"...a military solution to the Chechen problem was also opposed by the most popular figures in the Armed Forces at the moment -Army General B. Gromov (Deputy Minister of Defense) and General Lieutenant A. Lebed (Commander of the 14th Army in Predniester). Thus within the top leadership of the Armed Forces on the eve of the opening of military actions there is a visible split which reflects the complexity of the moods in the army. <sup>10</sup>

Izvestiya, 10 December 1994, p 4

Initial reports indicated that the Russian forces were fully prepared and even eager to do battle with the Chechens. As Radio Liberty reported on 9 December:

FIGHTING SPIRIT IN RUSSIA'S TASK FORCE FOR CHECHNYA . . . In Mozhdok (North Ossetia), where a large Russian task force stands poised on Chechnya's border, officers interviewed by Western reporters are in a robust mood. One officer told a correspondent for Le Monde (8 December) that "we need a new Stalin who would show us how to deal with these dark-skinned types." Another officer told a correspondent for The Independent (6 December) that Chechnya "must be not merely defeated but destroyed." He endorsed the view of a 19th century Russian commander in the protracted Caucasus war that "extermination rather than pacification is the way to secure long-term control" of the region. Russian TV on 7 December described the "fighting spirit" in the Russian task force and interviewed two of its officers who presented themselves as "mercenaries" recruited and paid specially for operations against Chechnya. <sup>11</sup>

ITAR-TASS reported as late as 26 December that Russian servicemen stoically were withstanding combat conditions and, citing an example of morale, noted that 35 of 37 servicemen in one outfit scheduled for discharge to the reserve decided to prolong their contract with the armed forces. <sup>12</sup> Not all reports were this optimistic about soldier morale, however.

Most significant in this aspect was a report that some very important Russian generals were not as excited about the prospects of entering and fighting in Chechnya as these soldiers. Eleven generals of the military council of the ground forces, including the commander, Colonel-General V. Semenov, appealed to the State Duma that Russian forces were not prepared for such an operation. Semenov and the other generals noted that the army had not had a single divisional training exercise since 1992, that military equipment was in a sorry state, more than a third of the army's helicopters could not fly, the force was undermanned, and emergency supplies were partially consumed. <sup>13</sup>

The appeal revealed an even more serious problem in the army since it's routing bypassed Minister of Defense Grachev and was sent directly to the State Duma and Federation Council, the second time in recent months that Semenov had done so (the first time was over the issue of

the real situation in the army, an appeal co-authored along with Colonel-General Gromov). By bypassing his official chain of command, Semenov's actions along with the poor state of the army's readiness invite the question "are we witnessing the disintegration of the Russian Army's chain of command?"

The mood of excitement among soldiers quickly dissipated as well, however. During the move into Chechnya the Russian MVD and armed forces met local resistance everywhere except along the northern route. By 13 December Radio Liberty was reporting the following:

The reports further suggested that Russian MVD soldiers were mostly passive and demoralized, and in some cases even seemed to sympathize with the local people. Russian headquarters charged via ITAR-TASS that some local residents were firing at the vehicles' fuel tanks and wheels. In a blustering statement released through Russian media the same day, Defense Minister Pavel Grachev charged that more than 30 armored vehicles had been set on fire and that some Russian soldiers had been dragged out of their vehicles by the Ingush. Grachev accused Ingushetia's Ministry of Internal Affairs of colluding with the civilian resistance and firing on the Russian troops. Grachev moreover accused Ingush President Ruslan Aushev (alongside whom he had fought in Afghanistan) of having "declared war on Russia." Aushev replied the same day that his people were showing their solidarity with the Chechens and accused some Russian troops of starting incidents by firing on civilians. <sup>14</sup>

A few days later a Russian General refused to lead his convoy deeper into Chechnya. Major General Ivan Babichev of the 19th Motorized Rifle Division (later reports indicate he was the commander of the 76th Airborne Division) reportedly said his men would advance no farther. Babichev clearly distrusted the actions of his government, noting at one point that a nighttime attack by unidentified forces against his column had probably been orchestrated by Russian security services in order to provoke an attack on the Chechens. <sup>15</sup> Two other generals, Lieutenant General Alexander Lebed, a darling of the nationalist right and Commander of the 14th Army, and a Deputy Defense Minister, Colonel General Boris Gromov, the last Soviet commander in Afghanistan, came out openly against the Chechnya operation. Gromov said he would join mothers in protesting the sending of their sons to Chechnya. One source noted that:

The military unhappiness over Chechnya is probably not caused by a liberal concern for minority rights. It is more likely motivated by sympathy with the extremist right -- people like the passionate, eloquent publicist Alexander Prokhanov, who argue that Russia has historically allied with the Islamic world and should stay that way. Outbursts by influential generals have left Defense Minister Pavel Grachev, already tainted by allegations of corruption, isolated. And it leaves the counterintelligence chief, Sergei Stepashin, who is thought to be the driving force behind the Chechnya operation, on a brittle political limb. <sup>16</sup>

There were many other examples of poor morale among the troops. Pavel Felgengauer, a military analyst for the newspaper Segodnya, reported that several Russian officers from the Pskov paratroop division resigned in protest of the actions in Chechnya. A Duma deputy noted that

Russian fighters were not especially thrilled about conducting military operations against their fellow countrymen, and denied rumors about "massive desertions from the troops now on the territory of Chechnya." <sup>17</sup>

Dissent reached even the Russian High Command. Deputy Defense Minister Georgii Kondratev reportedly joined fellow Deputy Minister Gromov and Lieutenant General Aleksandr Lebed, commander of the 14th Army in Predniestrnya, in publicly criticizing the use of force in Chechnya. Deputy Defense Minister Mironov did likewise. Kondratev said that Chechen president Dzhokar Dudayev, who declared his republic independent from Moscow in 1991, was a "legitimate leader" with whom Moscow should hold talks, not fight. "There should be no repetition of the ill-considered actions which were taken several days ago," Kondratyev said. "There's no point sending our boys to die there. Chechens should decide how to stop the bloodshed by themselves." <sup>18</sup> Kondratev, as noted above, was one of those dismissed by Grachev on 22 December.

By 26 December, local press and activists (reminding one of Vietnam) incited desertions and caused a sharp drop in soldier morale. For example, the commander of the Ural Military District accused the Vecherny Ekaterinburg newspaper and Channel 4 TV of spreading anti-war sentiments among servicemen. <sup>19</sup>

## ***Russian and Chechnyan Force Structure, Strategy, and Tactics.***

### ***Force Structure.***

Russian (Russian sources estimate the force at 40,000 men): - heightened state of readiness in the 21st air assault brigade from Stavropol (1 Dec) <sup>20</sup> - Russian TV channel two by two (2x2) reported on 1 December that 38 AN-12 transport aircraft with servicemen and combat hardware landed in Beslan, North Ossetia; Radio Mayak reported that the North Caucasus military district sent troops and equipment to Mozdok, North Ossetia to protect communications, prevent act of sabotage and banditry, and rebuff detachments of fighters from adjacent territories if necessary. These forces will assist the Interior Ministry's internal troops in case a state of emergency is introduced. - military transport aircraft have transferred units from the Pskov and Tula Airborne Assault Divisions to the Mozdok area (2 Dec) <sup>21</sup> - the numerical strength of Russia's border troops in North Caucasus was boosted by 50% (8 Dec) <sup>22</sup> - a decision was taken to form, by 25 December, a sizable swift reaction group from units of the North Caucasus military district and subunits of the airborne assault troops to isolate Chechnya and prevent armed gangs from penetrating its territory (9 Dec) <sup>23</sup> - tanks, self-propelled howitzers, MLRS, minesweepers, bridgelayers and other combat engineer vehicles came from units in the North Caucasus Military District (NCMD); most infantry came from Internal Forces of the MVD, from new mobile-forces light infantry brigades, and from the airborne assault forces; NCMD army air groups are providing the air cover (14 Dec) <sup>24</sup> - units of the Northern Group of Russian troops moved from Tolstoy-Yurt toward Grozny (15 Dec) <sup>25</sup> - Radio Liberty reported on 19 December that some troops from the Ural Military District had been ordered to Chechnya and that public protests were under way in Sverdlovsk Oblast against the proposed deployment <sup>26</sup>; and on 19 December the Far East Border District's Chemical Defense Brigade is on increased readiness, and a motorized Kharbarovsk Border Guard unit was boarding railway cars today, to arrive in Grozny



on 25 December <sup>27</sup> - two battalions of marines (21 Dec) <sup>28</sup> - several units from central Russia, including a motorized infantry regiment from the Kazan area, have left for Chechnya, said a spokesman for the military district. At a meeting of the Russian government's special commission for Chechnya, chaired by First Deputy Prime Minister Oleg Soskovets, a decision was announced to send fresh units of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and of the Border Troops to Chechnya, government officials told Interfax the same day (22 Dec) <sup>29</sup>; and the Terek and Kuban Cossacks started raising four battalions for participation in the process of restoring constitutional order in the Chechen Republic. <sup>30</sup> Later Yegorov said this action contravened constitutional norms.

- the 276th reinforced motorized rifle regiment (part of the 32nd division located in Yekaterinburg) has arrived in the zone of the Chechen conflict, and will be part of the defense minister's personal reserve (27 Dec). <sup>31</sup>

- report that the 19th Division and the 76th Airborne Division were involved in the initial phase of the operation (29 December) <sup>32</sup>

**\*\*This force structure and the comments of Grachev in late November about the readiness of his mobile forces indicate that what was probably utilized in the intervention was the Russian immediate reaction force. For comparative purposes, see Figure One.**

*Chechen (Russian sources estimate 11-12,000 men):*

- volunteers arrived from Dagestan and other areas of the Caucasus. Mojahidin are arriving, and men in the villages are forming their own battalions. They are "responsible to Allah and not me," President Dudayev noted (2 Dec). <sup>33</sup>
- on 3 Dec Dudayev announced the mobilization of the male population aged between 17 and 60. <sup>34</sup> This move was refuted by the Russian federation Government which noted that setting up mobilization points and the call-up to active military service was illegal on the territory of the Chechen republic. <sup>35</sup>
- mercenaries from North Caucasus republics, the Baltic states, Ukraine, and Afghan Mujahedin from Azerbaijan arrived to help Dudayev; they are paid about \$100 a day plus bonuses (5 Dec) <sup>36</sup>; a report from 19 December stated \$800-\$1000 a day.
- a suicide regiment to protect Dudayev and fulfill his missions, and a women's battalion are forming (7 Dec) <sup>37</sup>
- in 1991 troops left Dudayev 50 modern tanks, 200 aircraft, and huge stores of modern weapons and ammunition (14 Dec) <sup>38</sup>
- 300 former supporters of Georgia's Zviad Gamsakhurdia arrived via Azerbaijan in Chechnya to help Dudayev (22 Dec) <sup>39</sup>
- some illegal band formations are dressed in the uniforms of Russian servicemen and are deployed on the outskirts of the town of Dolinskoye. They have committed hostile acts against the local population, to include mining oilwells and dismantling expensive equipment at oil installations, creating a "second Kuwait." (25 Dec) <sup>40</sup>
- refugees from the fighting report that the special formations fighting against the Russians in Chechnya include: municipal police; Omon (wear black berets with a sign of the Chechen national flag on the left-hand side and a sign of a wolf on the right), armed with submachine guns and anti-tank grenades; Chechen national guard recruiting people from Grozny; people's self-defence forces wearing black woolen hats and consisting mostly of

rural residents; mercenaries dressed in camouflage uniforms of different types; and masked groups who have declared blood feuds (26 December). <sup>41</sup>

- FSK chief Stepashin noted that Afghanis, Benders from Ukraine, the Baltic republics, Tajikistan, Jordan, and some Russians are fighting against Russian forces; salary is \$800 a day (29 Dec) <sup>42</sup>

## **Strategy.**

### *Russian strategy.*

"For the sake of saving people's lives I have given instructions that bombing strikes which could lead to fatalities among the civilian population of Grozny be ruled out."

President Yeltsin on Russian TV, 27 December 1994

Months before the fighting started the Russian armed forces had made contingency plans for potential operations in the Caucasus region, as noted above. Even after such preparation, the Russian military operation never intended to resort to a full scale intervention by Russian military forces. Those planning the operation assumed that opposition forces already operating in Chechnya were sufficient to conquer Dudayev and take Grozny. This operation was secretly supported by military contingents under the command of the Federal Counterintelligence Agency (FSK). Opposition forces led by opposition Provisional Council leader Umar Avturkhanov fought Dudayev's forces, with the intent to either defeat or at the least soften up the latter. The FSK supported this effort by leading a "black operation" that enlisted the support of the Russian Army through recruitment of several officers and soldiers from divisions near Moscow, purportedly without the knowledge of the local commanders. Later Grachev admitted complicity in the operation, the first of a long line of disinformation fed to the media (for more on disinformation campaigns, see section below on The Use of PSYOP).

The Russian Army had actually begun active support of the operation much earlier. On 30 November Colonel General Prudnikov, Commander in Chief of the Russian Air Defense forces, noted that since August his command had received the order to "close" Chechen airspace. Prudnikov said since this time not a single plane landed in Chechnya or left its air space without his permission. This was done to ensure that mercenaries, weapons or ammunition were not airlifted to Chechnya, and helped ensure the opposition forces and the FSK that Dudayev was dependent on those forces already in country.

Another press report that indicated early Russian involvement in Chechnya stated that the Dudayev-opposition was trained at the Russian "Kurse Vystrel," a course for Russian and foreign officers located to the north of Moscow. They trained there through at least 3 December. <sup>43</sup> Kurse Vystrel retrains and perfects combat skills for officers of various branches, much like a U.S. refresher course or an advanced course at branch schools. The course updates officers on new equipment and tactics, and lasts four months. Two cycles are taught annually. It is likely that the Russians simply used the facilities at Kurse Vystrel and developed a special secret course for the Dudayev-opposition (if they in fact were there). Further evidence of complicity by Kurse Vystrel in the training came when the corpse of a slain Russian warrant officer was shown on the cover



of Izvestia. He was identified as a member of the Vystrel unit, even giving the unit's postal number. More than likely, he went into battle with those he trained.

The Dudayev-opposition attack on Grozny on 26 and 27 November was a catastrophe. While reports as to actual numbers vary, a Duma official reported that 82 Russian soldiers participated in the operation and about 27 were taken prisoner. <sup>44</sup> According to Dudayev, 67 tanks and many other types of Russian armored vehicles were destroyed. <sup>45</sup> A representative of the Russian airborne said the attack failed because "without an infantry cover, it was really senseless to bring tanks into the city." <sup>46</sup> In less than a months time the Russian army would repeat this mistake.

By 1 December, when it was fairly clear that the opposition would be hard pressed to oust Dudayev, a conventional Russian military buildup began on Chechnya's border. By 5 December Grachev had admitted Russian complicity in the bombing of Grozny's airfield and he blamed himself and the General Staff for the recruitment of Russian officers and men for the Chechen warfare. <sup>47</sup> Advisors to President Yeltsin advised him that if he used force in Chechnya, he should apply it only in those areas occupied by the opposition to Dudayev, where people could be peacefully disarmed. Then similar demands could be made to Dudayev to encourage his troops to do the same thing. However, Yeltsin chose the full-scale intervention route. As Emil Pain, head of the nationalities policy branch of the administration of the Russian president, noted, "the attempt to subjugate by force territories supporting Dudayev is a most dangerous mistake." <sup>48</sup>

Later reports indicated that Pain was correct in his analysis. According to indirect information from high military circles, the decision to intervene was made at the top political level, and the defense minister obeyed unquestioningly. He and the General Staff, the report indicated, did not undertake a complete analysis of the situation, and troops were not prepared for such an operation. Formulated tasks were unclear, with only a "general concept", that is to disarm illegal formations and support Internal Affairs troops. Storming Grozny was not part of this concept. More likely, a unit, the report concluded, will attempt to find Dudayev and, since no one wants a noisy trial, Dudayev will perish while trying to escape. <sup>49</sup>

Oddly enough, Yeltsin chose to begin the invasion of Chechnya on 11 December, a day which was to have marked the first anniversary of the Russian Constitution. This time, the tank parade was not in Red Square but in Chechnya. Russian troops moved into Chechnya from the Russian ethnic republics of Dagestan in the east, Ingushetia in the west, and from the North Ossetian town of Mozdok in the northwest beginning on 11 December. <sup>50</sup> One correspondent noted that the operation represented Grachev's first real test of the mobile forces concept, on which he had spent so much time and effort. <sup>51</sup> The operation was designed to block Grozny and the republic so that disarmament of the warring sides could begin. The operation was limited in its scope, however. Presidential press secretary Vyacheslav Kostikov told journalists on 12 December, a day after the intervention, that "Grozny will not be stormed" <sup>52</sup>, a point confirmed by Presidential Council Member Smirnyagin the same day. <sup>53</sup> Federation Council Speaker Shumeyko noted that Russian forces would not fight the local population. Events would prove all three men wrong. In fact, on 12 December, ITAR-TASS reported that Russian rules of engagement were to use force against anyone who fired at them: "in case weapons are used against the troops the servicemen were instructed to repel the attacks by all available means." <sup>54</sup>

The first stage of the operation was to seal off Grozny, eliminate illegal armed formations, and end the participation of the Russian army, transferring authority to the MVD and establishing a temporary government as the operation progressed to its second phase. <sup>55</sup> In Yeltsin's TV address of 27 December he listed as a "paramount task" the restoration of the Chechen section of the North Caucasus railway. "This is a truly vital route not only for Chechnya but for all the republics of the Northern Caucasus and the Transcaucasus." <sup>56</sup>

Intervention troops also brought food and other supplies with them to hand out to the population. <sup>57</sup> Yeltsin gave "illegal armed formations" in Chechnya and the Ingush-Ossetian conflict until 15 December to lay down their arms; and since 13 December Yeltsin had his representative who was controlling the conflict, Deputy Prime Minister Nikolay Yegorov, destroy "armed posts" established by Dudayev via the Russian air force. Yegorov emphasized that troops were in Chechnya to free the Chechen people from the Dudayev rule. <sup>58</sup> He also noted that no night actions were planned, and that MVD tasks included disarming illegal armed formations; protecting the population from extremism; creating conditions for the stabilization of the socio-political situation; restoring constitutionality, law and order, and the economy of the Chechen Republic. <sup>59</sup>

Defense Minister Pavel Grachev boasted that the operation would be easy and that he could control all of Chechnya with just a paratroop regiment. <sup>60</sup> He was quickly proven wrong, even by his own admission. In fact, it was apparent that Grachev and his officers were shocked by the reception they received throughout the areas of the western and eastern intervention routes. As Grachev noted:

We never thought that on our own territory, anyone, hiding behind women and children, would shoot their own citizens in army uniform in the back...Local inhabitants, taking advantage of the fact that servicemen could not use violence against the peaceful population, have been dragging troops out of their vehicles. <sup>61</sup>

It is hard to tell if Grachev was telling the truth about the ROE, or if this was disinformation to gain sympathy from the population.

By 15 December it was clear that the armed forces would not execute their initial goal for several days. As Radio Liberty reported at that time:

The three columns of armor and motorized infantry, converging on Grozny from three directions, found themselves at distances ranging from 15 to 40 kilometers from the Chechen capital, their advance slowed down by crowds of unarmed villagers blocking the roads and by occasionally effective resistance from outnumbered and outgunned Chechen units. Observers estimated the strength of the invasion force at some 40,000, with at least 200 tanks and armored vehicles in each of the three columns. <sup>62</sup>

An ITAR-TASS correspondent who had ridden toward the Ingushetian frontier a few days earlier (on 11 December) found most rises and bends in roads turned into fortresses, bridges closed off with reinforced concrete blocs, and some bridges, according to local sources, mined. Local

inhabitants passed along Russian troop locations and actions via ham radios. <sup>63</sup> Clearly the local population was prepared to take action against any intervening force.

Ingush President Ruslan Aushev had indicated that trouble lie ahead for any Russian force designed to intervene in Chechnya, a warning Grachev ignored. He told Komsomolskaya Pravda on 8 December that he was opposed to a Russian invasion and that it would lead to protracted guerilla war. Ingushetia, Aushev underscored, would oppose the transit of Russian forces through its territory en route for Chechnya "because the Chechen are our brothers" while Ingush Vice President Boris Agapov similarly warned that Russian actions "may compel people to take up arms, since most Ingush see the situation in Chechnya as a conflict between Chechnya and Russia." <sup>64</sup>

Trouble for Russian forces was also predicted by Igor Alpatov, a former Russian Colonel and author of the book Peculiarities of the Afghan War and its Consequences. According to Alpatov, any regular officer knows basic truisms about war, and the use of the armed forces in Chechnya is violating them. He rejected any partial use of the armed forces. It was all or nothing in his opinion, but the decision to use such force should be based on the following criteria: first, it is impossible to fight a war or participate in a conflict that is unlawful or not sanctioned by the constitution, since it can only lead to disgrace for the armed forces in the end; second, it is not possible to fight in cities not included in a theater of operations, and it is a military crime to bomb a city not ready for military operations as in an 'official war'; third, a soldier with a weapon can only be considered a defender of the country when sanctioned by law. Otherwise he becomes an outlaw with its ensuing consequences; and finally, in inter-state conflicts it is impossible to take hasty action and support one of the conflicting sides, because this will encourage guerilla actions against your force. <sup>65</sup>

The first stage of the intervention was eventually near completion by 26 December, according to a Security Council statement that said Russian Armed Forces had liberated a substantial part of Chechen territory from illegal armed formations. <sup>66</sup> President Yeltsin announced the near completion of the first stage as well, and noted that the second stage envisaged setting up power bodies and the corresponding services in the republic. Yeltsin's "corresponding services" include the establishment of a state of emergency and zone of operation. Control of this operation will pass to the MVD, a fact verified by Vitaliy Laptev, an official of the Russian Temporary information Center. <sup>67</sup> Presidential Council Member Leonid Smirnyagin stated that military tasks only included overcoming heavy military hardware and illegal armed formations of the opposition. The rest was left up to the MVD. Their task would require reestablishing law and order in the republic, ensure that public utilities began functioning again, and, together with the FSK, set up operational investigation groups.

Planning for the second phase of the operation was conducted earlier, perhaps influenced by the potential peacekeeping scenario proposed above:

Elements of Russian political planning for Chechnya (see Daily Report, 21 December) continue to emerge. Dmitrii Oreshkin, head of the Russian Academy of Sciences' Mercator analytical group and seemingly involved in the planning, told NTV on 18 December of a possible division of Chechnya in three parts: the

southeastern highlands, composing one quarter to one third of Chechnya's territory and into which the resistance forces would be pushed; the central lowlands, including Grozny and other industrial towns, to be defended by Russian troops against expected guerrilla attacks; and the northern Nadterechnyi Raion (with its Cossack minority and an influential pro-Moscow Chechen group) which "is expected to gravitate toward Russia." <sup>68</sup>

Looking to the future, Vice Premier Shakhrai's plan was discussed as a potential model. The plan stated that it would take 2-3 years to settle events in Chechnya. A most important step in his plan occurs after illegal formations are disarmed, when local self-ruling bodies are created. He plans to create a legitimate popular chamber by having populated centers nominate 1-2 people to the body. This body will prepare documents to elect power bodies, and will hold a referendum on a Chechen Constitution. <sup>69</sup> Until these bodies are established, Russian Government Decree No. 1411, "On the Territorial Administration of Federal Executive Organs in the Chechen Republic," will enforce order in the republic through cooperation with and help from more than twenty Russian ministries. <sup>70</sup>

Such a plan will come none too soon for Emil Pain. He noted that more conformity is required between political and military actions. For example, in the operations first stage, troops entered Chechnya before the deadline for the voluntary surrender of weapons expired. In the second stage, Pain added, Yeltsin did not finish his speech on Russian TV, in which a halt to the bombing was promised, before air strikes started again and tanks began to assemble for an assault on Grozny. <sup>71</sup>

Yeltsin hinted his approval to this plan in his TV address, in which he gave one future task. He encouraged the preparation of conditions for holding elections in accordance with the Russian Constitution and its laws once the situation quieted down in Chechnya.

By the time of Yeltsin's address, Chechnya and its neighbors had a serious refugee problem on their hands. The Russian plan called for the Ministry of Emergency Situations (which handles natural catastrophes such as earthquakes, oil slicks, etc.) to organize a large-scale operation to deliver humanitarian aid to Chechnya <sup>72</sup> and to displaced refugees in neighboring republics. Reports indicate that as of 27 December more than 27,000 left the territory of Chechnya. Nearly 17,000 are in Ingushetia and 7,000 in Dagestan.

*Chechen strategy.* Dudayev's strategy against the "170 tanks, 5,000 mercenaries" of the opposition during the 26 November Dudayev-opposition assault was simply to defend Grozny and prevent opposition forces from getting into the city. The opposition attack was nothing new, Dudayev noted. In 1991 there were 70,000 Russian troops in Chechnya, they occupied part of Chechen territory in 1992, organized an armed opposition coup in 1993, and now have launched an open assault. They have used the mafia and Islamic fundamentalism as scourges to eliminate. Where does the truth lie? It lies in the fact, according to Dudayev, that no legitimate power emerged in Russia after the fall of the USSR and a state of law was set up in Chechnya. Now Russians want to destroy that state. <sup>73</sup>

A radio commentator noted that Russia wants to "hold talks on talks" while secretly, at first, and then openly getting ready for war and, having started the war, regard it as a stimulus for talks. First the Russians apply pressure with an intervention and then want to hold talks. These are Hitlerite tactics that will not keep the Chechen people quiet. [74](#)

Once the Russian intervention began, the strategy of President Dudayev appeared to rest on varying degrees of resistance offered by a series of concentric rings as one approached the center, that is Grozny.

The first ring consisted of civilian opposition to the advancing Russians and harassment by Chechen fighters. This part of Dudayev's strategy worked quite well, even causing some Russian commanders to state that they would advance no farther, and some Russian units of up to 40 soldiers (platoon strength?), who simply stated they did not want to fight, were reportedly taken prisoner by civilians. There was little opposition in the Chechen north since the Moscow supported "Dudayev opposition" moved with the column and held explanatory talks with residents of the area. The other two columns, moving from Ingushetia and Dagestan, had their movement hindered from the very first day. [75](#)

The second ring of the strategy focused on an area approximately 20-30 kilometers out from Grozny. Here Chechen fighters offered real resistance, to include Grad (MLRS) rocket attacks and offensive assaults on Russian positions. This defensive belt slowed up the attack from the east and west, and hindered the attack from the north, which was not affected by the civilian opposition as much since the Moscow supported opposition to Dudayev lived in this area.

The third ring, and its core, is the city of Grozny. Here the Chechens have put up firm resistance for over two weeks now and show the capability of holding out for a few more days. At the same time, intense house to house fighting has caused many Russian deaths and injuries. The Chechen resistance is seasoned and motivated by a religious zeal that is not limited by ideology or self-interests. This, to the Chechens, is a matter of survival as a people and race.

If defeated in Grozny, there is another part to the Chechen strategy. The Chechens will retreat to the mountains and begin guerilla warfare against Russian forces that remain in the republic. This strategy implies that the Chechens will fight the Russians, or at least harass them, for the next ten to twenty years. For Russia, such a strategy offers them the likelihood that the conflict will turn into a "Vietnam" or an "Ulster." As early as 21 December reports on Russian TV indicated that the mountain resupply operation has already begun as "unidentified aircraft have dropped a number of containers with weapons, ammunition and large sums of hard currency onto mountainous areas of Chechnya." [76](#)

Other elements of Dudayev's strategy may include, although one cannot say with 100% certainty, the "second Kuwait" option (that is, light the oilfields on fire) or the use of nuclear weapons, most likely tactical nuclear weapons. While Dudayev has not utilized these options, there are rumors that he has the capability to do so.

## **Tactics.**

## ***Russian tactics.***

The initial road march into Chechnya was eventful in that several of the columns were delayed by civilian crowds on roads who refused to allow the columns to pass. Snipers took unopposed potshots at the convoy, slowing its advance even further. It was as if the Russian Army had forgotten all it had learned about convoy activities after years of learning in the guerilla country of Afghanistan. <sup>77</sup>

The road march was also marked by reports that the crews of several Russian vehicles informed local inhabitants how to disable their vehicles. Already the will to fight appeared to be missing, a feeling verified a few days later by the refusal of a Russian division commander to proceed any farther into Chechnya. Radio Liberty reported that:

In a speech to Russia's Federation Council and at a news conference in Moscow, both on 15 December, Ingush President Ruslan Aushev confirmed earlier reports that Russian soldiers in the columns crossing Ingushetia en route to Chechnya had often urged the protesters on the highway to disable the military vehicles and had shown them simple ways to do that. The eastern column was reportedly still mired on the border with Dagestan; information about it remained sketchy, but Ekho Moskvyy reported from the field on 17 December that the column was not about to move forward and had been partially disarmed. Besides passivity and fraternization with civilians, Russian soldiers began displaying the more brutal side of military demoralization. In a widely reported incident partially witnessed by visiting Russian Duma deputies, at least nine Ingush civilians were murdered by Russian soldiers; an ethnic Bashkir soldier was also killed by apparently drunk Russian fellow servicemen. (In earlier incidents, another Russian soldier and the Ingush Minister of Health were killed by drunken Russian soldiers, as were five Ingush villagers.) Units approaching Grozny were for the first time reported by correspondents to be committing violent robberies. <sup>78</sup>

Initial skirmishes were with snipers who fired at the columns or with armed bands in and around villages on the way to Grozny. It also became apparent that the intervening force was ill prepared to fight the Chechens under such conditions. Members of the Russian High Command had attempted to warn the leadership the day before the intervention of the state of military preparedness within the army:

GROUND FORCES GENERALS CONTRADICT GRACHEV. Komsomolskaya pravda on 10 December carried an article stating that eleven top generals in the Russian Ground Forces--including the commander-in-chief, Colonel General Vladimir Semenov--had sent an appeal to the parliament decrying the poor condition of the forces. The paper contrasted this with the recent declaration by Defense Minister Pavel Grachev that the military was fully combat ready. The paper quoted the appeal as saying that without "immediate intervention at the state level" the Ground Forces might not be able to carry out their duties. The generals were quoted as saying that there had not been a single divisional training exercise since 1992, that the forces were drastically undermanned, that more than



a third of the helicopters were grounded, and that equipment was inadequate. The paper ended by saying it was talking not just about an attempt by a group of generals to stand up to Grachev but also the complete disintegration of Russia's Army. <sup>79</sup>

Russian action was slow and indecisive. It was not until 19 December that the air force took out the TV tower <sup>80</sup>, not until 20 December that night time tactics were described as surprising the Chechens, <sup>81</sup> and not until 21 December that the last satellite link was removed, and now telephone lines have been cut. <sup>82</sup> Reports of violent robberies committed by Russian soldiers were indirectly confirmed by the Internal Affairs Ministry's spokesman in Moscow who said at a briefing, as cited by Interfax on 20 December, that "armed bandits in Russian Army uniform are on the move, attacking refugees and looting." <sup>83</sup>

By 22 December, Western and Russian news agencies reported that the Russian air bombardment of Grozny had begun (0500 on 22 December) and that the shelling of villages were "terror" bombings apparently aimed at persuading the population to leave and to force Dudayev to desire a political settlement. Ethnic Russian residents, with the water, heating, electricity, and food supplies in Grozny severely disrupted, wanted to leave like a growing number of people in Grozny but, not having relatives in the countryside, tended to remain behind, exposed to the hardships of a war among whose stated aims was that of protecting them. <sup>84</sup> On 24 December, Russian TV reported that the armed forces were using mass leaflet drops to try to influence the thinking of the local population. <sup>85</sup>

In what appeared to be one of the most intense engagements of the conflict, eleven members of a Russian "reconnaissance" (spetsnaz?) unit were killed and five were missing in fighting for the village of Petropavlovka to the north of Grozny, according to a Russian communique. <sup>86</sup> Russian reconnaissance units played a key role in the early fighting, and had orders to knock out Dudayev's headquarters and seize the most important strategic facilities in Grozny.

On 21 and 22 December Russian SU-25 and SU-27 jets attacked Grozny. According to Radio Liberty:

The bombing of Grozny marks the first time since Guernica (1937) that the air force of a European power has destroyed a city on its own territory; but Grozny is a more clear-cut case because, at Guernica, an external force shared responsibility for the atrocity. <sup>87</sup>

Another report indicated that Mig-31s and Su-27s were continuously in the air for visual reconnaissance and "immediate response." <sup>88</sup> Other armed forces' missions were to eliminate illegal armed groups along the main railway route in Chechnya and intensify air and artillery strikes on Dudayev's strongholds. <sup>89</sup>

By 25 December 80 percent of Chechnya was without electricity and gas supplies to nearly half of the tiny mountainous region had been disrupted. Russia's 2 by 2 television said Russian troops had failed to surround Grozny completely as of Sunday morning, but Chechnya's vice-president, Zelimkhan Yandarbiyev was quoted by Interfax as saying that Russian soldiers, backed by tanks

and artillery, controlled one third of the city perimeter. <sup>90</sup> Reports from the Russian armed forces were more optimistic. A government spokesman in Moscow claimed the Russian ground forces had completely sealed off Grozny. Russian Interior Minister Viktor Yerin said armored divisions were holding positions between 2 and 15 km from Grozny. Speaking of the Russian leadership, Chechen President Dudayev declared at this time that "Russian leaders live like maggots in bacon." <sup>91</sup>

### ***Chechen tactics.***

Chechen forces, on the other hand, "are laying mines and using Afghan-type hit-and-run tactics" and outside "mercenaries" added their guerilla warfare knowledge to supplement Chechen tactics. Dudayev ordered his forces to set up ammo dumps, mine communications facilities, erect roadblocks, establish sniper firing positions on the roofs of buildings, and carry out acts of sabotage on oil refining enterprises and stores of fuel and lubricants. <sup>92</sup> Routes were prepared for militants to retreat into the mountainous areas and combat activities were launched in the rear of Russian troops through the use of subversive groups or mobile combat groups. <sup>93</sup>

### ***Use of Psychological Operations (PSYOPS).***

Manipulating someone's thoughts, emotions, impressions, or beliefs through intimidation, blackmail, disinformation, or rumor involves a craft known as psychological operations. Its techniques are universal yet cheap if put into the hands of skilled and competent operators. Its principles are applicable to many civil wars all over the globe.

PSYOPS is often described as a force multiplier at the tactical level. More accurately, in the age of real-time reporting, it is much more than that. Actions at the tactical level transmitted instantaneously via satellite can have strategic significance in that they can impact not only on forces in confrontation through traditional means (leaflets and loudspeakers) but also on governments and world organizations via today's hi-tech communications networks. PSYOPS is also a dangerous weapon in that its tools can mobilize world opinion for or against an event through "perception management", that is transmitting an event for the world to see through your own chosen filters if possible or, in a worse case, through someone else's. PSYOPS is a particularly strong weapon of small nations who can expose abuse by stronger countries and thereby exert pressure not possible in earlier times. It is one of the most often ignored yet important aspects of the war in Chechnya.

In Chechnya, accusations abound that operations were run against the population and the leadership by both the Russians and Chechens. Here we are not talking simply about the overt use of leaflets and loudspeakers, although the Russian army and air force have used both in the conflict, <sup>94</sup> but also the covert use of psychological pressure through disinformation. The start of the invasion, in fact, had a distinct PSYOP aspect as the Russian side employed leaflets, loudspeakers (to relay an appeal to the population to lay down their weapons and not provoke the Russian force), and radio interference in Grozny. Simultaneously, useless talks were held in Vladikavkaz to gain time and intimidate the Chechens. The Chechens, on the other hand, used human road blocks, the protests of women, threats ranging from the possession of nuclear weapons to the unleashing of Islamic fundamentalists not controlled by Dudayev, and

international pressure from organizations such as the Congress of the Peoples of the Caucasus (who threatened to turn the whole region into a raging inferno). The Chechen intent was to damage the morale of the Russian soldier and political leadership, and mobilize Russian public opinion against the intervention.

Since PSYOP is generally cloaked in secrecy, it is extremely difficult to expose planned PSYOP, particularly its source. What is offered here therefore represents speculation based on operations that appear worthy of consideration from a PSYOP perspective. First, however, a few words about the press in general.

The Chechen conflict represents the first time that Russian and foreign correspondents have so closely monitored a Russian intervention. Since this was the first time, as expected, the relationship got off to an extremely bumpy start, much like U.S. operations involving military force (the media's use of camera flood lights while covering the U.S. Marine's nighttime landing on the shores of Somalia, for example). The mass media focused on the burning equipment and on the number taken prisoner, mutilated or killed. The government accused the media of focusing on the wrong thing, pressing for more coverage of officials reading statements on the legitimacy of the action. <sup>95</sup>

The press, on the other hand, viewed the timing of the operation, on a weekend, as an effort by the government to minimize initial coverage of the action since weekend newspapers do not appear with regularity and TV coverage is more entertainment orientated. One observer noted that, having exposed the professional unfitness of military leaders and government officials through their reporting, the press became the first victim of the intervention when Sergei Gryzunov was removed from the leadership of the Provisional Information Center operating from Mozdok. <sup>96</sup> Image is everything, and Gryzunov was not paying proper attention to the image of the armed forces in someone's opinion. His replacement, Valentin Sergeyev, did not fare any better. Mayak Radio reported on 20 December that Chechens in Grozny had condemned Sergeyev to death, and to demonstrate their resolve they announced Sergeyev's home address, and his office and home telephone numbers. <sup>97</sup> The press, clearly, is not a safe business these days in the Caucasuses.

The Russian people also were not pleased with the press's performance. An opinion poll taken by a Komsomolskaya Pravda sociological service on 20-21 December with the title "90% of Muscovites Still do not Understand what is Happening in Chechnya. And Private Zhivun Will Never Know" showed that 45% of the population felt it was not getting a complete picture of what was happening in Chechnya, 45% felt they were partially clear on what was happening, and only 10% said they understood what was going on there. The same poll showed that most Moscovites were most afraid of deaths among Russian soldiers and terrorist acts in Moscow and Russia. In addition, nearly 58% did not approve of the Security Council decision to impose order in Chechnya. <sup>98</sup>

**The peacekeeping rationale for intervention.** As noted above, one of the reasons for the intervention was to run a peacekeeping mission to separate the warring sides. Such an operation would envision Russian forces serving as a "forcible peacekeeper" who could disarm the two conflicting sides by introducing a limited contingent of troops. One is hesitant to call this a

PSYOPS plan, since clearly it had the chance to become a legitimate operation if the "black operation" had succeeded.

By serving in such a capacity Russia could have participated in the disarmament of Chechnya without recourse to the bombing of Grozny in the short run, although in the long run Russian efforts may have been sabotaged anyway by Chechen snipers and guerilla tactics. Unfortunately for the Russian military, they were never able to get to the stage where they could proclaim their force as peacekeepers, enter Chechnya peacefully without loud international protest, and pull off the disarmament of the Chechen side without bloodshed according to a well-developed plan. The exposure of the complicity of the Russian military on the side of the Chechen opposition, even though Grachev intentionally misinformed world opinion by vehemently denying that this was true (use of the Big Lie), ended this option. Whether the Russian military entertained the idea of pulling off the operation under the peacekeeping guise will probably never be known. However, as a sidelight, it was interesting to note that when Grachev decided to put another commander in charge of operations on the ground he chose Colonel General Vorobyev, the ground forces peacekeeping representative to the Totsk exercise involving U.S. and Russian forces in September of this year.

**Disinformation and intimidation.** Disinformation and intimidation were used throughout the initial stages of the conflict, and both the Russian and Chechen leadership noted its use. Russia's Interfax reported on 21 December, for example, that Yeltsin's deputy chief of staff, Vyacheslav Volkov, had warned that "several special centers have been set up in Moscow to issue misinformation for Russian journalists on events in Chechnya." "It was that misinformation that underlies several stories having an anti-Russian slant," Volkov added, but he declined to name the centers. <sup>99</sup>

It is very difficult to ascertain if a report is disinformation or the truth. The following example could fit Volkov's idea of disinformation or it may represent good analysis and reporting. Aleksandr Yevlakov, writing for Rossiia, noted that:

Bets have been placed on psychological war, the ratcheting up of hysteria, and the use of provocations, which is not surprising: the same cadres are in charge of planning the operation. In October 1993, the mythical weapon of intimidation was "Supreme Soviet snipers," whom no one has ever seen, now it is "Caucasian hit-men" who have allegedly left for the capital and other cities to carry out terrorist attacks...according to the logic of the developments, a number of absolutely real explosions must occur somewhere. Maybe their perpetrators will also be found- a few Chechens would "confess voluntarily" that they did it on General Dudayev's orders. Subsequently, "the indignant population" would carry out anti-Caucasian retaliation actions on marketplaces, which would give sufficient grounds to impose a state of emergency "at workers' requests." <sup>100</sup>

Another report cited "sources close to the Defense Ministry" who described a conference on 30 November in which the task was formulated for Interior Troops and the Defense Ministry to "boost the morale of the troops as soon as possible and reverse Russian public opinion which is extremely negative toward Russia's being involved in a new Caucasian war." <sup>101</sup> This report

added that military leaders discussed some extreme, wild options which included exposing terrorist plans to capture a kindergarten, circulating a rumor that Russian prisoners had been executed, sabotaging one of Moscow's 318 hazardous installations, or hijacking a plane. The idea, then, was to incite wrath among the population against the Chechens. Again, is this report disinformation or the truth?

There was another disinformation operation identified by ITAR-TASS. It concerned statements made by forces on behalf of the Confederation of Caucasian Peoples that "special headquarters to support Chechnya" were established in the region. <sup>102</sup> Representatives of republic permanent missions under the Russian Federation president called the claim disinformation or nonsense. However, respondents included representatives from Ingushetia and Dagestan, two republics that have supported opposition to Russian troops advancing through their territory. Therefore, it is hard to believe that these representatives did not speak entirely for their countrymen, and it is even harder to imagine that some type of clandestine headquarters were not established! Ingush President Aushev, after all, called for such actions and has filed suit against Grachev in court over the intervention into Ingushetia.

One highly respected Russian, human rights plenipotentiary Sergey Kovalev, who endured the initial Russian bombing of Grozny, told Radiostantsiya Ekho Moskvyy that "yesterday, let me remind you, representatives of the Russian Government claimed that the night bombing raids on Grozny had stopped and that the explosions in the town were initiated by Dudayev himself. That is a blatant lie, and if we remain alive, I [Kovalev] will demand publicly, to the whole world, that these insolent fellows are punished immediately and most severely." <sup>103</sup> Kovalev's report indicated that Russian press agencies were responsible for disinformation.

President Yeltsin, in his TV address of 27 December, indicated that the Chechen side is trying to buy off the media. He stated that "I am aware that Chechen money is involved in the operation of some of Russia's mass media." Thus the battle wages, misinformers fighting misinformers in the battle of "perception management" of the conflict. The battle has become so intense that Yeltsin named Vice Premier S. Shakhrai to serve as the head of a special information analysis commission. His tasks were to monitor reports in the mass media on events in Chechnya and analyze public opinion in the context of the perception of government decisions and to cover the activity of federal authorities as they attempt to settle the conflict. <sup>104</sup> Radio intercepts reveal that the threat is real:

The FSK asserts that it is in possession of monitored radio information from official sources in Grozny in which direct instructions are given to use all resources, including material resources, to ensure that the Russian mass media carry information necessary to Dudayev. <sup>105</sup>

Such reports have kept the government consistently on the defensive. <sup>106</sup> In addition, independent reporting from the conflict site has caused many problems for the Russian military press. The military press is accustomed to traditional "Soviet" (limited access) methods of reporting events and Chechnya has clearly overwhelmed them and their attempts to try to handle a pool of correspondents "western style". The military reporting repeatedly has been at odds with civilian reporting over the bombing of Grozny (when and how much), over the actual number of

casualties suffered by the Russians (grossly underestimated according to independent correspondents), and over the true desire and willingness of MOD to negotiate. This has damaged the credibility of the military press.

The military itself is not accustomed to having the press observe their every action either. As a result, some correspondents have found the Russian military exceeding their powers, in the western sense, by inhibiting the work of journalists, detaining a correspondent and confiscating his film, stripping a Radio Liberty correspondent of his accreditation and recordings, and firing at a car carrying Reuters news journalists. <sup>107</sup>

On the Chechen side, disinformation and deception were also employed. Mercenaries and guerillas, as well as Chechen soldiers dressed in Russian uniforms (of which there is no short supply, since literally the entire male population over 25 served in the Soviet armed forces) were mistaken for Russian soldiers by young Russian conscripts. For example, Russian conscripts got out of their vehicles to ask for a cigarette from what appeared to be another Russian soldier and were shot. This added an extra touch of psychological tension and indecision for all Russian soldiers and officers. The same can be said about the existence of Chechen suicide battalions, which meant that Russian soldiers prepared themselves for all kinds of assaults, to include individuals with explosives strapped on them in kamakazi style attacks. This caused the Russian military to look on even closer at the civilian population with suspicion and anxiety.

Not all Chechen actions were devoted to violent acts, however. In one case, Russian reconnaissance groups said that Chechens were holding 2,000 Russian citizens for use as a human shield, an obvious act of intimidation to thwart a Russian attack. <sup>108</sup> In another case, at an extraordinary session of the People's of the Caucasus, a decision was adopted to simply hinder the movement of troops toward Chechnya, a simple civil disobedience action, and an operational headquarters was established to coordinate such activity. <sup>109</sup> Outside the Presidential Palace in Grozny, meanwhile, a large group of Russian women decided to go out and meet with the troops to try to convince them to avoid bloodshed. <sup>110</sup> In yet another case, Vice President Zelimkhan Yandarbiyev passed information to a Lithuanian for western dissemination that the Russian army was using chemical weapons, namely a gas that damages the skin. <sup>111</sup> This and another report about chemical weapons, the latter stating that the Russian armed forces and academy of chemical weapons have a plan to use warheads with nerve gas of the CS type in Chechnya, both originated from Kiev. <sup>112</sup>

One other news item is worthy of consideration as Chechen disinformation. A Baku source claimed that the Chechen Minister of Press and Information told him that the Chechen leadership had obtained a plan of the Russian government, signed on December 1 by Prime Minister Chernomyrdin, that states all Chechens will be expatriated from the Chechen Republic to other Russian regions. <sup>113</sup> This is the type of information that, when properly disseminated, will incite hatred and a fight to the death throughout the region.

Disinformation or the truth, the fact is that both sides have demonstrated an amazing adeptness to utilize all sources and means to transmit messages according to their own designs. There are clear lessons to learn from their operations.



**Nuclear and Islamic threats.** Early in the fighting Dudayev used the threat of Islamic groups operating on his territory as being beyond his control. This put psychological pressure on the Russian military leadership because they now, according to Dudayev, would be facing extremists not intent on negotiating but only on exterminating Russians. The day before the Russian intervention, on 10 December, Dudayev, in an interview with Izvestia, said that the situation was serious:

"In every village and rayon, Islamic battalions have formed independently. Islamists have poured into them from all the corners of the earth-instructors and fighters. And when our chief of staff instructs them to take up a defensive position on this or that sector, they reply: 'We are God's soldiers now, not yours. We will exact vengeance and go further, and you and your democracy can go play with Russia.'" <sup>114</sup>

Dudayev may have overestimated his following, however, as support did not pour in from abroad, even from places where Islamic conferences were at that moment in session.

In November, Dudayev played the nuclear disinformation card. He requested special U.N. troops to come in and protect weapons of mass destruction from attack by Russian special forces. This hopefully was a deceptive move by Dudayev to scare the Russian decision makers into thinking he had nuclear weapons. <sup>115</sup> The possibility does exist, however. After the USSR broke apart, then Vice President Aleksandr Rutskoi noted that some tactical nuclear weapons were missing but never said what had happened to them. In September 1993 Moscow News reported that the Chechen republic had paraded SS-20 missiles at a military review in Grozny. The SS-20 is a solid fuel, mobile missile system with a range of 5 to 9,500 kilometers and capable of launching a powerful nuclear charged warhead. <sup>116</sup> All were supposedly destroyed under the INF Treaty. The report quoted an unidentified missile expert in the following way:

All the missiles of this class...have probably been destroyed. However, we cannot be completely certain that all the items, especially their components, have been accounted for...troop experts could easily assemble a missile from these parts. Besides at missile units and training centres there were many SS-20 models. All training sessions were conducted on them only. One of the models, allegedly written off, could feasibly get into the hands of Chechen President General Dudayev, bearing in mind that the Kapustin Yar launching site is situated, like Chechnya, in the North Caucasian military district. <sup>117</sup>

It was assumed that the Caucasus Military District would be a front during wartime and so it had large stocks for frontline operations. These included depots with a capacity of 13,000 railway cars and storage facilities for nearly 1000 tactical and operational-tactical missiles. The entire area was unstable during the past few years, as cantonments were plundered, some officers, personnel and their military equipment went over to "sovereign states", and "control over the movement of weapons and military hardware was almost lost completely there from the middle of 1992 to the summer of 1993." <sup>118</sup> If the basic missile shell exists, say a mock up at a school, then Russian's fear that the Chechen mafia may have bought the guts or internal components for such a weapon (SS-20's were to have been destroyed under the INF treaty) on the black market

in order to get one or two in an operational posture. Simply acquiring a warhead, and a detonation capability, could result in the destruction of a large, massed Russian force and contaminate the area around it.

Whether nuclear weapons were in Dudayev's control or not, and whether Islamic groups were beyond his control or not, really doesn't matter. In both cases the Russian military and political leadership had a reason to feel more than the normal psychological tension involved in intervening in the internal affairs of its own republic. The revenge instinct of the Chechen leadership certainly carries heavy weight in this part of the world and added to the tension. More than one Russian analyst has undoubtedly concluded that the Chechen leadership could take parts of Russia (and the world) with it to the grave through the use of suicide unit attacks on nuclear or biological facilities, or through the use of nuclear weapons (if in fact Dudayev possesses them) without a second thought.

*(End of Part One)*

1. The description included the following:

**Geographic Definitions:** Bordered on the East and West by Caspian and Black Seas, on the north by Kumo-Manychskaya Depression [north of the state border of the Russian Federation] and in the south by the Turkish and Iranian borders. Length is 1,000 km north-to-south and about 500 km east-to-west at its narrowest point. Region divides into three parts: North Caucasus, Central Caucasus, and Trans-Caucasus. Total area is approximately 440,000 sq. kms. Terrain is dominated by major mountain chain, the Caucasus [highest peak, Mt. El'brus reaches 5,642 meters], and steep valleys. River systems in the north flow west to east [Terek and Kuma]. Terrain is difficult and rail lines form chief Lines of Communication in theater. Ports on Black Sea and Caspian coasts provide some access to hinterland.

The climate of the region ranges from moderate to sub-tropic. Land cover ranges from steppe to desert and semi-desert and includes some major forests on its hills and mountainsides. Steep and isolated valleys create an ethno-demographic quilt of diverse peoples.

Economically, the region has had an extractive economy based on oil and natural gas in Azerbajdan, the Caspian coast, and Chechnya. Azeri fields were developed in late 19th century and pre-date West-Texas strikes. Off-shore and secondary production are growth areas. There is a sharp rivalry among major oil companies for access to Caspian fields. It is also a major producer of lead, zinc, cooper, manganese, molybdenum, iron, coal and cement; and is a rich agricultural region with specialized production in truck farming, wine-making and distilling, and tea cultivation.

Historically, the entire region was part of Imperial Russia and the Soviet Union. Russian expansion into the region began in late eighteenth century and involved seeking allies among Christian population and suppressing local revolts that had tribal and religious content. Conquest of Chechnya was long and bloody. In the Soviet period the region briefly enjoyed independence from Moscow but was re-conquered by early 1920s. Some national groups in region tended to side with German invaders during Great Patriotic War and were treated as "traitor-nations" when

areas were reconquered by Red Army. Chechens were one such people. Since 1991 and the end of the Soviet Union the region has seen the emergence of three sovereign states [Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan] from Soviet Union. Chechnya, although a part of Russian Federation, has claimed sovereignty and independence. Caucasian region is one of the most complex ethno-religious regions in the world and has been a battle ground since the time of the Medes and Persians. More than 50 distinct ethnic groups can be found within this theater. It has also witnessed an explosion of ethnic tensions within and among these states and within the Caucasian peoples who live within the Russian Federation. These areas include North Ossetia, Chechnya, Dagestan, Kabardino-Balkar, and Ingushetia. Predominantly Russian regions and the base of operations for Russian forces are Krasnodar and Stavropol' Provinces.

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54. ITAR TASS 1411 GMT 12 December 1994, as reported in FBIS=SOV-94-239, 13 December 1994, p 26.[BACK](#)
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60. Mikhail Leontyev, "Nobody's Prisoners of Nobody's War," Segodnya, 29 November 1994 p 1, as reported in FBIS-USR-94-137, 20 December 1994, p 28.[BACK](#)
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108. Radiostantsiya Ekho, 21 December 1994 as reported in FBIS-SOV-94-246, 22 December 1994, p 25.[BACK](#)

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113. Baku Turan 12 December 1994, as reported in FBIS-SOV-94-239, 13 December 1994, p 26.[BACK](#)

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